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# FSEC Minutes June 15, 2015

University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate

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THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF RHODE ISLAND

FACULTY SENATE OFFICE

**Faculty Senate Executive Committee Meeting #2  
June 15, 2015 9:00 – 11:00 AM**

**MINUTES**

1. The meeting was called to order at 9:05 AM on Monday, June 15, 2015 in Library Conference Room B, Chairperson Rollo-Koster presiding. Senators Kusz, Rarick, Sullivan, Tsiatas, and Welters were present.
2. Minutes of FSEC Meeting #1, June 5, 2015 were approved as amended.

**3. ONGOING BUSINESS**

a. Chairperson Rollo-Koster referred to the June 5, 2015 email (and report) from Director Swift, Chair of the General Education Implementation Steering Team (GEIST) regarding the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) standards for accreditation and discussed her response to it. The email had described a recent meeting between GEIST members and a senior administrator at NEASC regarding the standards for the general education program evaluation that would be part of the URI accreditation in 2017. Director Swift and GEIST members had raised concerns about possible deficiencies in the structure of the new URI general education program. Chairperson Rollo-Koster, in response to the email, had convened a meeting on June 9, 2015 with Director Swift, Senator and GEIST member Mead, General Education (GE) Committee Chair Kinnie, and Senate Vice Chairperson Welters to discuss the findings and an appropriate response. She reported on the meeting. At the conclusion of that meeting, Chairperson Rollo-Koster indicated that she would attend the GE Committee meeting, scheduled for June 11, 2015, to express the concerns that had been discussed. [Notes from the June 9 meeting are attached.]

Chairperson Rollo-Koster then reported on the June 11, 2015 GE Committee meeting. The GE Committee had addressed the concerns expressed by both GEIST and the Senate Chair, particularly that combining arts and humanities into a single 3-credit outcome fails to meet the requirement of breadth and balance, and that the current rubrics do not provide evidence of written and oral communication *in English*, nor demonstrate knowledge and understanding of historical phenomena, nor a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind (requirements from NEASC “Standards for Accreditation” rev. 2011). Chairperson Rollo-Koster had further indicated that evidence of a focus on the subject matter and methodologies of historical phenomena was lacking (NEASC standard 4.17). She reported that the GE Committee would consider developing two separate outcomes for arts

and humanities and would continue to work on the rubrics. Chairperson Rollo-Koster said that GEIST planned to go forward with the course submission process with only those rubrics that had been approved. Discussion ensued. Senator Kusz expressed concern about some of the language used in the Knowledge Outcomes Rubric for Social and Behavioral Sciences. He noted that the rubric placed social science in the STEM disciplines. The FSEC discussed the development of the rubrics, the process used by the GE Committee for their completion, and the need to review and finalize all rubrics before soliciting course proposals. The FSEC agreed to review those rubrics posted on the temporary general education website marked “final” and offer suggestions to the GE Committee for improvement or clarification.

The FSEC discussed the consequences of structural changes to the general education program (changes to the outcome areas) and the process of approving a new structure through the Faculty Senate. They discussed their concerns about moving forward with the course submission process when the rubrics were not complete and when possible structural changes were pending. The Committee agreed to communicate these concerns to Director Swift. The Committee further agreed to wait until the regularly scheduled meetings of the full Senate in the fall to recommend for approval any structural (general education) program changes.

**b.** The FSEC discussed agenda items for the upcoming meetings of the Chair and Vice Chair with the President and Provost.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Neff

**Special Meeting  
June 9, 2015**

**Notes**

A meeting was convened by Senate Chair, Joëlle Rollo-Koster on June 9, 2015 with GEIST members Director Judith Swift and Senator Art Mead, and General Education (GE) Committee Chair Jim Kinnie. Senate Vice Chair, Linda Welters, was also in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to respond to and discuss the email distributed on June 5, 2015 by Judith Swift. The email described a recent discussion with an administrator at the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) regarding the standards for general education program evaluation that would be part of the URI accreditation in 2017 (report is copied below). Concerns were expressed in the email and report about possible deficiencies in the structure of the URI general education program.

Senate Chair Rollo-Koster summarized her concerns about the (2014) revised general education program and the protracted process to finalize the rubrics. She asserted that, because the “Knowledge” and “Competencies” rubrics were written with a focus on their respective majors and not with consideration for the breadth necessary for a general education course, faculty who had attended the rubric workshops (faculty who teach general education courses) had asked for significant changes to these rubrics. She also noted that the role of GEIST includes identifying implementation barriers and directing their concerns to the appropriate committee or group. GEIST has expressed concern to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC), the GE Committee, the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC), and the Subcommittee on the Assessment of General Education (SAGE) that the URI general education program fails to fully address the NEASC standards for accreditation, as stated:

4.19 Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind. ("Standards for Accreditation" rev. 2011)

Of specific concern, are the standards, “Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate . . . a knowledge . . . and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind.” GEIST has asserted that the rubrics (including those in the “Responsibilities” area) not provide evidence of these standards and that this will potentially, negatively, impact accreditation.

Director Swift acknowledged the years of work on the part of many in developing the revised general education program but indicated that there needs to be an allowance for an intellectual evolution, a community evolution, of the program. She said that GEIST is striving to create a positive message surrounding the revised program for the benefit of students and faculty.

Director Swift raised concern for the grouping of the Arts and Humanities into one outcome requiring only 3 credits. She said that GEIST had researched many other programs and did not find any other comparably structured programs. Senator Mead said that the URI structure does not correlate with the NEASC requirements. Senate Chair Rollo-Koster said that many faculty have expressed their concerns to her about this issue and she understands that an amendment to the program could be proposed in the Senate under New Business. The group discussed the mechanism for obtaining Senate approval of a change to the program during the summer months.

Director Swift suggested that implementation proceed using the rubrics that have been finalized and are acceptable. These were identified as:

2. Knowledge Outcomes Rubric: STEM Disciplines
3. Knowledge Outcomes Rubric: Social and Behavioral Sciences
4. Written Communications
5. Communicate Effectively
6. Mathematical, Statistical and Computational Literacy
7. Information Literacy
12. Grand Challenge Courses

Work to revise the rubrics for these outcomes is ongoing:

8. Civic Knowledge and Responsibility
9. Develop and Exercise Global Responsibilities
10. Cultural Competence
11. Integrative Learning

Outcome 1. Arts and Humanities Disciplines, is under consideration for change.

Senate Chair Rollo-Koster said that she wanted to attend the upcoming General Education Committee meeting (scheduled for June 11) to express the concerns that had been discussed at this meeting. General Education Committee Chair Kinnie was asked to adjust the agenda for the June 11 meeting to accommodate this request.

*Recorded by Nancy Neff, Faculty Senate Coordinator, 6-9-15*

[6-4-15]

## GEIST Report

### University-wide General Education Requirements vis-à-vis

#### Internal and External Accreditation

Members of GEIST met with a member of the upper administration of NEASC to get clarification on the changes anticipated in NEASC standards that would affect URI in its next round of accreditation in 2017. The meeting was worthwhile and illuminating. Overall, it is clear that NEASC is revising the standards to lessen the number of words in their standards

and to simplify the requirements. Current standards were revised in July of 2011 and can be found at

<https://cihe.neasc.org/standard-policies/standards-accreditation/standards-effective-july-1-2011>.

The impetus for revision is twofold: 1) NEASC revises its standards to more effectively address current educational and societal needs on a regular basis, and 2) there are trends that need to be addressed with a review of standards. NEASC does not expect a significant set of changes, however, other than to give even greater latitude to institutions to define what they articulate as their institution's mission and to design ways of measuring how they meet those standards. In essence, as long as URI has a clear line between its mission and the metrics associated with that mission coupled with a careful appraisal as to how well those factors align, NEASC is satisfied. The accrediting agency is not interested in defining the mission or prescribing how the institution achieves that mission and the discrete elements contained therein.

The one area where NEASC sees itself seeking more evidence relates to the pressure from Washington, DC with regard to the high cost of education and metrics that demonstrate value in that investment, e.g., graduation rate, employment opportunities, assessment of alumni, etc. For any of us who read the news and, in particular, The Chronicle of Higher Education, this is no surprise.

Particular takeaway points that will remain as accreditation principles and are important to consider are as follows:

#### NEASC Standard 4, Paragraph 19

- NEASC is very flexible as to how a university chooses to meet its requirements for a general education program, so long as that university can show how its general education program relates to the institution's overall mission and purpose.

- NEASC looks for three types of evidence of success of a general education program: quantitative, qualitative and anecdotal. All three are important and given equal weight. Because quantitative data can be easier to document, there may be a temptation for an institution to prioritize the types of knowledge that readily lend themselves to that sort of analysis. To counteract that possibility, NEASC has introduced a reflective essay to its expectations for a university's self-study report.

- NEASC is in the process of revising its general education requirements, beginning the initial phases of this revision next week [week of June 1<sup>st</sup>]. It is hoping to have fewer outcomes, not more, in its upcoming version.

Given the focus of our new general education program, it is important to note that NEASC sees no change in the following section, NEASC point 4.19 (in "Standards for Accreditation", rev. 2011) regarding general education:

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate . . . a knowledge . . . and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind.

Given that the current rubrics do not provide evidence of these points, the institution will need to be prepared in its self studies to show where else in each student's curriculum that these key components are addressed.

A further analysis of the NEASC standards serves to highlight the following points:

4.19 Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication **in English** [emphasis GEIST]; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the **aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind** [emphasis GEIST].

The requirements of this paragraph can be presented as a series of statements about what students graduating from URI should be able to demonstrate

Competence in written communication in English  
Competence in oral communication in English  
Ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning  
Capability for continuing learning, including skills of information literacy  
Knowledge and understanding of scientific phenomena  
Knowledge and understanding of historical phenomena  
Knowledge and understanding of social phenomena  
Knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic dimensions of humankind  
Knowledge and appreciation of the ethical dimensions of humankind

Which of the NEASC requirements would automatically be served by the assessment of the eleven Student Learning Outcomes in the new General Education Program?

Here is an initial analysis:

NEASC requirements in 4.19, July, 2011 standards	Student Learning Outcomes which guarantee assessment	Comment
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	relevant to the NEASC requirements	
Competence in written communication in English	Write Effectively	Rubric would have to be restrictive
Competence in oral communication in English	Communicate Effectively	Rubric would have to be restrictive
Ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning	Mathematical, Statistical and Computational Strategies	
Capability for continuing learning, including skills of information literacy	Information Literacy, Integration	Grand Challenge courses also serve this requirement
Knowledge and understanding of scientific phenomena	STEM Knowledge Area	
Knowledge and understanding of historical phenomena	None	Closest would be the Arts and Humanities Knowledge Area
Knowledge and understanding of social phenomena	Social and Behavioral Sciences; Civic Knowledge and Responsibility	
Knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic dimensions of humankind	None	Closest would be the Arts and Humanities Knowledge Area
Knowledge and appreciation of the ethical dimensions of humankind	None	Closest would be the Arts and Humanities Knowledge Area and Global Responsibilities

We raise these points to prepare those who will be engaged at any level of providing assessment data and/or contributing to the self-study lest they think the new general



education program will address all of the requirements seamlessly. It will not. With that in mind, it is imperative that the General Education Committee, LOOC and SAGE all define how these areas will be addressed. As the NEASC official noted, there will need to be some way in which the university demonstrates that all of its graduates have met these standards, e.g., “knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic dimensions of humankind.” Reference to LEAP or some other study will not suffice. In some areas, use of this and similar reports have been cherry-picked. As a companion piece to how we will address the external requirements of NEASC, which is clearly moving in the direction of assessing an institution’s efficacy by encouraging the setting of their own mission and related goals of achievement with a concomitant self-designed way of assessing the achievement of those goals, we must be clear and have a policy that reflects that agreement. All this must occur within the framework of NEASC’s standards—standards that are relatively predictable and open to the university’s design for meeting and reporting their efficacy. To date, a good deal of the NEASC as driver for a SLO-based general education program has been described as more prescriptive and demanding than is actually the case.

We are left then with the need to explain the internal policies and guidelines that govern any standards not prescribed in the NEASC standards. Our current policies are outdated and do not align with this new general education program. It is critical that faculty have both an understanding of the external and internal needs for the design of the new general education program. While there are numerous accreditation agencies that apply to the professional schools and some departments within Arts and Sciences, et al., the details of these cannot be the leading rationale for the overall promise of a liberal education component to a university education.